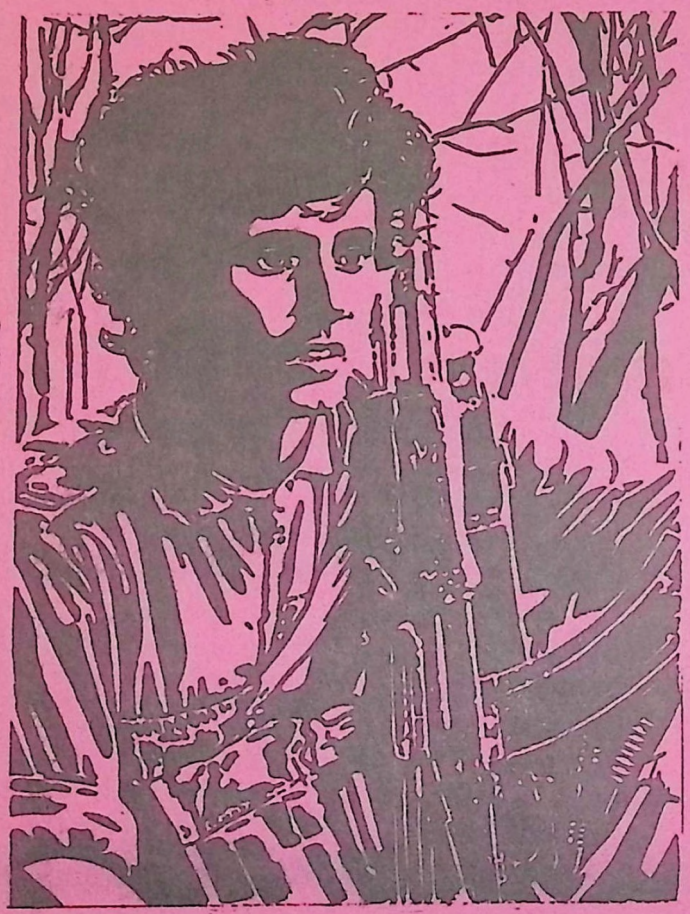
# Rumblings In Oman



*Repression and Impoverishment*

After heavy autumn rains flooded the valleys of Oman and damaged the date crops, Sultan Qabus increased the peasants' suffering by asking them to pay taxes on their unmarketable produce. Such are the conditions that predominate in today's "modern" Oman.

Recently visiting Oman, a survey team sponsored by the Ford Foundation and UNICEF praised the new ruler and gave testimony to a new and progressive society:

*"The twentieth century arrived in Oman seventy years late...just three years ago this month in the little-known sultanate at the mouth of the Arabian/Persian Gulf, young Sultan Qabus ben Said deposed his father and ended the repressive rule which had helped keep his country an isolated feudal society. Qabus, educated in Britain, and eager to use Oman's newly discovered oil resources to raise his people's standard of living, immediately launched the drive for development. For the proud and ancient culture of Oman, it was, he said---a new Dawn."*

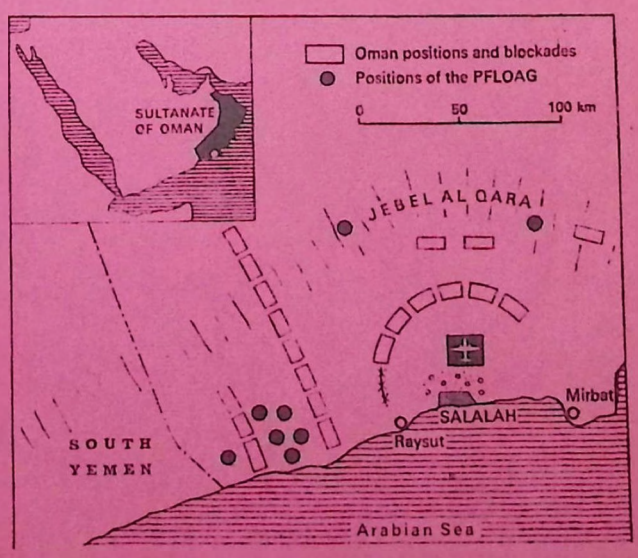
*"A New Dawn for Oman and its Women,"*
*UNICEF News, July, 1973*

One very concrete aspect of Oman's development drive that has been carried on from Qabus' father (Said ibn Taimur), but certainly intensified by Qabus himself is increasing development of censorship, bans, deportations, imprisonments, and executions. In June, 1973, seventy-four Omanis were given long prison sentences for "subversion" and seventeen were executed. Such measures have been a direct response to political and military successes of the Popular Front for Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG).

Since 1965, PFLOAG has grown rapidly, with its influence spreading throughout the Gulf region.

*"At present, the Dhofar Rebellion in Oman against the ruling Sultan and the volatility of the labor movement in Bahrain are the greatest dangers to the existing regimes* (within the Union of Arab Emirates)."

*The Middle East in Crisis: Problems and Prospects* (subcommittee report, 92nd Congress, Washington, D.C., 1971)



This year, repressive ordinances have been greatly extended by the Sultan. Not only must one refrain from direct political attack upon the state, but criticism of conditions within internal or external governments is forbidden. One cannot oppose the policy of any "friendly" state, nor can one criticize behavior of government employees. Bans have been placed upon radio listening, and citizens are warned against listening to the "Voice of Revolution" emanating from Aden in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

Abusive security searches by mercenary soldiers are common, and reports from women include molestation and rape. In the large Dhofari town of Salallah, some districts are considered off-limits to citizens of neighboring districts because of suspected PFLOAG activities.

As in the other artificially created states that belong to the "Union of Arab Emirates" (The UAE is a federation of Gulf sheikdoms established in 1971 after Britain withdrew some of its forces from the area), there has been increasing imperialist pressure to consolidate the power of Sultan Qabus and bolster his deteriorating image. In Oman, impressive promises have been made to the people, but needed services such as adequate housing, health care, and employment have not been granted. Recently, a delegation of two hundred from the Eastern region of Ja'alan went to the royal city of Muscat to demand construction of a long-promised school and hospital, but they were turned away despite their sizeable representation (*Saut al-Thawra*, Nov., 1973).

Food prices have risen to such an extent that a large bag of rice costs almost as much as the monthly salary of a mercenary soldier. Because of soaring prices, oranges have become a luxury. In Salallah, a citizen described living conditions in this way:

*"In this town and other towns in the region, conditions continue to go gradually from worse to the worst. Unemployment flares up and prices soar in connection with foodstuffs."*

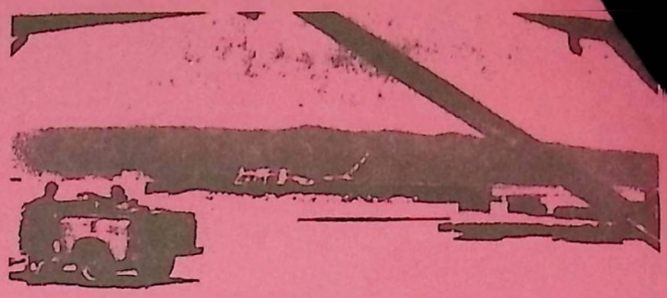
*"All of this at a time in which villas and houses are constructed while the sweeping majority of citizens live in mud caves called houses."*

(*Saut al-Thawra*, Dec., 1973)

*The Sultan's Army*

Within the Sultan's army, discontent has become pronounced. Inadequate wages, false enticements, heavy losses to the People's Front, and contradictions between Omanis and foreign troops pose continual dangers to the monarchy's stability. Compulsory conscription laws require citizens who refuse service to pay an impossible fine of 500 *riyals* ($333). Rampant unemployment has facilitated military recruitment by employers: job seekers are immediately referred from "no vacancy" situations to conscription into the army.

On September 22, seven members of the Sultan's army joined the People's Liberation Army with their rifles, thus expressing readiness to join the revolution rather than surrender to it. Refusals to wear uniforms and increased officer resignations, despite the danger of imprisonment, result from a traditional colonialist problem---namely friction between nationals and mercenaries within all levels of the army.



*Transport planes and helicopters behind splinter-proof barriers at the Salalah airbase.*

For example, all technical jobs, such as repairs, are supervised by Indian officers. The emergency armored and artillery forces are managed by British and Jordanian officers, as are basic command operations and intelligence. Any Omani who wants an official position within the army (or the government) must be able to speak and write English ---a cultural indignity that is also in the colonialist tradition.

*During the October War*

During the first days of the war, Omani officials in Muscat were negotiating with British officers as to what to do. No serious gesture of support for the Arab cause could be found. Instead, Qabus, with advice from the British, took the opportunity to order bombings of liberated areas in Dhofar. In order to neutralize further any support from the Gulf area, Jordanian intelligence sent messages to Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Ras al-Khaima to prevent demonstrations or protests. Oman was content with setting up a committee to collect war donations from citizens and to deduct these funds from workers' wages.

*Behind Qabus*

The power of Qabus springs from the support of Britain, Iran, Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, behind which lie U.S. imperialism and its strategy for Oman and the Arabian Gulf. According to F. Luschinger, editor of the Swiss *Neue Zurcher Zeitung*:

*"Military expenditures in and for Dhofar have risen six-fold in the past three years, and today account for about half the state revenues of the sultanate (most of them from oil)---and a great deal more than that, according to estimates by unofficial observers."*

(*Swiss Review of World Affairs*, Dec., 1973)

Iran has taken over the Omani islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tumb, and Lesser Tumb (now officially labelled "Iranian" islands), and its navy patrols the Straits of Hormuz, where all oil tankers in the area must pass. Iran can inspect all ships, searching for arms allegedly being shipped to the revolution. West of the Straits, the Kuria Muria Islands in the Indian Ocean off Dhofar, have been transformed into landing strips for Iran's air force. In exchange, Iranian technical and military expertise, along with helicopters and other air weaponry, bolster Oman's position as the most militarily powerful of the Gulf "Emirates."

Although Oman was granted "independence" in 1958, Britain's influence has actually increased. More than 250 officers and non-coms work with the Sultan's infantry and air force. Also working with the British are 400 Jordanian intelligence officers and advisers, not to mention Baluch mercenaries from Pakistan and Indian mercenaries. The false "independence" engendered by Britain has allowed Oman to join the Arab League and the United Nations and to participate in the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations (Algiers, 1973).

...an military presence in the Gulf is no less ...ble than Britain's. The air base on the island ... Masirah has now become a joint British-U.S. fa...lity---a link in the chain of Western bases in the Indian Ocean that includes Singapore, Diego Suarez, Djibouti, and Kagnew in Eritrea. U.S. naval maneuvers have been apparent in the "non-aligned" sheikdoms for some time now.

After the October War, military provocations have been stepped up. On December 1, the General Command of the Central Asia Treaty Organization (CENTO) reported from its headquarters in Ankara, Turkey:

*"The naval forces of the pact started their annual maneuvers in the Arabian Gulf. These maneuvers will continue up to the second of December. Divisions belonging to Pakistan, Britain, and the U.S. will take part."*

(*Saut al-Thawra*, Dec., 1973)

Such movements are coupled with those of the American 7th Fleet throughout the Indian Ocean, including the Bab el Mandeb area at the mouth of the Red Sea. In December, the American aircraft "Hancock" sailed through the Strait of Malacca in order to cruise the oil routes and put in an appearance at the Strait of Bab el Mandeb. On land, Iran has been sending mercenaries to the borders between Dhofar and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Recently, Saudi Arabian troop concentrations totalling 30,000 have been noted along the borders of the PDRY's Fourth and Fifth Regions by the Embassy in Beirut, and by the newspaper Al Thawri (Baghdad) December 13.

*In the Field*

In 1971, when he testified before a Congressional subcommittee on the Near East, Joseph Malone, a former consultant to ARAMCO and the U.S. government (then chairman of the Department of History at Kansas State University), stated:

*The Dhofar rebellion's implications for the Omani regime are economic. Petroleum production began in 1967. No new strikes have been made and the Sultan and his government face a situation in which income from oil could cease in 1985. Between then and now, an infrastructure must be provided as the basis for establishing a diversified economy. Oman like Northern Yemen, has considered economic potential, especially in the well-watered Batinah Coast, but each day of combat in Dhofar reduces the chances of Oman to achieve economic self-sufficiency."*

(*The Middle East, 1971: The Need to Strengthen the Peace*---92nd Congress, Washington, 1971)

Two years after Malone's appraisal, two thirds of Dhofar is liberated territory under PFLOAG's control. Daily, the war of attrition advances toward Oman's inner regions, very often on several fronts. As the people's forces advance, they hit enemy positions by surprise. Light and medium weapondry are reinforced by mortars and heavy artillery. Attacks can be as short as a half hour and, sometimes, as long as six hours intermittently. Surprise, accuracy, and perserverance are key ingredients to pursuit of guerrilla warfare against the Sultan and his supporters.

From a field, a member of the People's Front describes a battle that took place in early November: ber

*"...For four days, members of the People's Front blockaded the air force base at North Sarfeet, preventing all planes from landing. The shelling that accompanied the blockade operation was carried out by our forces on the center, the airport, the command headquarters, and defensive artillery positions in the center. The attack was heavy and concentrated in a way shocking and astonishing to the enemy.*

*The British carried out hysterical raids on the near-by areas with the aim of restricting and limiting our artillery bombing, but in vain. Enemy losses during these operations in the Western region included the death and injury of seventeen members. Thirty-two positions were destroyed. Our losses in the western region included the martyrdom of citizen Saeed Ahmed Hussein and the extermination of six cows by aircraft, ten camels of citizens, and the burning of wide areas of grazing places."*

(*Saut al-Thawra, Dec.,1973*)

In terms of military capacity, the Sultan possesses long range artillery and naval vessels (purchased from South Africa) which are able to carry out major military attacks upon the PDRY. According to Ali Nasir Muhammad, Foreign Minister of the PDRY, "*This year, the PDRY has been exposed to 180 raids by the forces of Sultan Qabus,*" (*Ath-thawri, Baghdad,* Dec.13)

In spite of the air superiority enjoyed by the Sultan and his allies, F. Luschinger, the Swiss journalist,gave this portrayal of the vital British base at Salallah in Dhofar:

*"The war situation, in some ways, changes the face of this remote district surrounded by sea and desert. Making a broad perimeter around the airfield where Britain's RAF has had installations for some time, rolls of barged wire are spread across the plain, and, between them, small bastions made of rusty oil barrels, filled with sand, parking areas for a squadron of Strikemaster aircraft and a few dozen helicopters and transport planes, gun emplacements, and open supply depots are scattered over the flat land--all these components constituting a sprawling field fortification."*

Luschinger's recent visit to Oman and Dhofar led him to view the durability of the Sultan's land forces pessimistically.

*"The strain is already quite near the limit. At present, the rebel movement is tying down about one thousand of the government's operational troops and a total of four to five thousand or about half the Sultan's total armed forces, if support troops and other units are included in the reckoning."*

(*Swiss Review Of World Affairs, December, 1973*)

# BAHRAIN

*Repression Escalates-*

In Bahrain, ruthless repression campaigns have reached a new stage with the advent of "constitutional democracy." Under the command of British chief adviser Henderson, arrest campaigns have fi-led the local prisons. Most recently, arrests have covered workers, students, and members of the constituent committees who had demonstrated against Bahrain's military collusion with Zionism and against inflation and unemployment.

Militant worler opposition has been an integral part of Bahrain's history (See *"Bahrain May Day Strike, Resistance #9)*. Prior to November, effective strikes had been carried out by employees of the American Hospital, as well as communications employees, for higher wages. Most recently, the airport workers during the first of December, paralysed Bahrain's

main airport in demanding their proper pay. Arrest campaigns directed at the Federation of Bahraini Workers had been waged in October and were continued into November. At the Eighth World Trade Union Conference in Varna, Bulgaria, a resolution addressed to the Bahraini Council of Ministers condemned its repressive acts. It demanded immediate release of imprisoned workers and respect for international labor agreements, as well as permission for exiled prisoners to return.

The Union of Bahraini Students has worked to explain the false election platforms now being presented by candidates preparing for the Constituent Assembly. It has also demanded release of political detainees throughout the Island. Repression against the Union and its executive committee has been severe.

In order to make Bahrain a show case of development in the Arabian Gulf, the 'undesirable' population is being reckoned with. Of those tortured and interrogated by the Emir's regime, many have been incapacitated. Qassem Haddad, a nationalist poet, received a skull fracture in Qal'la prison and is in critical condition. Some detainees have been blinded and kept in mud for two or three days in order to extract confessions. For continuing arrests, new jails have been opened in Khamis village and on the al-Mahraq air base once the jails of Qal'la and Jida were filled. A women's prison has also been opened at al-Jafair (an American naval base area).

In a letter smuggled from one of Bahrain's prisons, conditions are described:

*"Youths are facing electricity torture, beating on the joints, prevention of sleep, exposure of X-rays on the face, kicking, confinement in small cells Marad abd-el-Wahab has been under torture for days and nights. Ibrahim al-Thawady's backbone has been broken, and Qassim Haddad is suffering frequent heart attacks. Saleba Eisania is pregnant and extremely sick. She has been prevented from seeing a doctor."*

(*Al-Hurriyah*, June, 1973)

The Minister of Justice, when informed that the woman was pregnant and needed attention, replied, "Who told her to join the revolution?" Delegates from the Kuwaiti Lawyers Association tried to speed up the trial in order to alleviate some of the prisoners' suffering, but to no avail."

## U.S. naval activities

Since 1971, the U.S. under a secret treaty with the Emir of Bahrain, has maintained a naval base there for 7th Fleet ships attached to the Indian Ocean command. During the month of October, the Emir falsely claimed that he was going to abrogate his treaty with the U.S. Instead, the al-Jufeir base was used as a stop-over for hundreds of "volunteers" on their way to Israel from Australia and Southeast Asia. The base also served as a fuel supply source for Israel.

During the war, television programs "related" to the war situation were beamed at the Bahraini population. One of these featured an interview with the U.S. stage and screen star Sammy Davis, Jr., who spoke at length about his visits to Israel and that country's great accomplishments.

Since the war, American naval activity has not diminished. On October 26, the 17,000 ton Lasalle, a super-destroyer which is the command ship for the U.S.' Middle East Force (MEF) which arrived in Bahrain for a six-day visit, together with a rocket carrier. Continued activity has been reported, probably in coordination with U.S. maneuvers at the mouth of the Red Sea.

## Campaign Against Red Line

Military communiques from *Saut Al-Thawra*, December 11-12, report that the Iranian army has invaded the coastal region of Dhofar. Rached Mohamed Tabet, Minister of Information (PDRY) announced in Beirut that the soldiers had disembarked in the proximity of Salallah. According to *Le Monde*, Jan. 4, there were 3,000 Iranian mercenaries fighting with "the partisans" and the Iranian forces had coordinated their efforts with Saudi Arabia, Britain, and Oman.*

The purpose of the campaign, according to military spokesmen for the People's Liberation Army of Dhofar, is to retake control of the "Red Line"**

**In a press release from PFLOAG, the purposes of the invasion were made clear: "Recently, naval maneuvers of CENTO in the Arab Gulf and the Gulf of Oman and provocative moves of the U.S. 7th Fleet on PDRY's coasts have provided imperialism's forces with a cover (military precedent) for the present invasion. This present co-ordinated campaign is aimed at producing a counter-revolutionary situation in the Gulf and the Arabian Penninsula to coincide with the same type of arrangements being projected for other areas of the Middle East. The over-all intention is to liquidate the growing revolutionary movements in all of the Arab region, foremost intention is to liquidate the Palestinian revolution, and to encircle the progressive regime in Democratic Yemen."*

***The Red Line is a former British road in the interior of Dhofar which was captured by PFLOAG in 1972 and held successfully despite past continuous efforts by Qabus' army and the British to recapture it.*

## Peddlin' Arms

Cashing in on the situation, US military men and engineers have obtained a firm footing, especially in Iran and Saudi Arabia.* In a year and a half, Iran's air force will have twice as many helicopters, combat and transport planes (as many heavy twin-jet Phantom fighter bombers as in Israel), and its navy will be four times as big during the present five-year plan (more submarines will be built) so as to provide armed escorts for tankers.

The US is scheduled to give Saudi Arabia some 100 Northrop P-5 fighters, huge Hercules C-130 transport planes, Hawk anti-aircraft missiles, radar systems against air attacks, and 19 warships (the entire Saudi Arabian navy today consists of four small patrol craft and eight hovercraft). There are 3,500 American advisers working under contract in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi pilots (including King Feisal's nephew) are being trained in Texas and Arizona

*Jacques Isnard, (Le monde*, January 19, 1974)

**In 1973, Iran increased its military budget 47%. In 1973, Saudi Arabia increased its budget 32%.*

"JUST AS WE FOUGHT DIRECT INTERVENTION IN INDO-CHINA, THROUGH EXPOSURE, EDUCATION, AND MASSIVE STRUGGLES, WE MUST MOBILIZE AGAINST THE NEW ATTACKS UPON THE REVOLUTION IN THE GULF. THE PFLOAG HAS CALLED ON PROGRESSIVE FORCES TO BEGIN IMMEDIATE EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS TO INFORM THE PEOPLE ABOUT THE STRUGGLE IN THE GULF. WE MUST RESPOND."

IN UNITY THERE IS VICTORY

--PFLOAG.